

NOVEMBER 4, 1982

Winter prospects are improving in the Shortgrass Country. Prices have fallen on sheep and cattle to the point that not any of us are going to waste much money on feed. I look for everyone to face economic reality after frost; for the first time in years, I suspect that hollow horns and woolies are going to have to adopt a self-help program to make it to spring.

The biggest break around Mertzon has been a sudden change in land values. Two or three weeks ago, an appraiser with the state breezed through the county. In a two-day visit he discovered that dry grazing land was worth nearly four times more than the tax rolls showed after the district was reevaluated a few years ago.

People around town didn't share my enthusiasm for the new schedule. They didn't realize that overnight our collateral worth had jumped so fast that a high speed chip would have to be added to the tax collector's computer. Real property was moving from 42 million to over 142 million and we weren't going to have to pay the new tax bill until next year.

I figured that I'd be able to fit it in two 180-day renewals plus a full 90-day extension before the tax burden ruined my paper wealth. Citizens that had always thought dry weather was going to be our downfall must have felt plenty stupid after they saw that the state was really the villain.

Several times I think I've told you that drouths were overdrawn. In my time I've seen about as many men go broke from a combination of divorces and tax judgments as I have from dry weather. The climate gets blamed for a lot of things that happen on a ranch. Back in the '50s when a big lamb weighed 40 pounds and a pretty good calf might make 300, I think dust blindness was as much a factor as the drouth was. You never saw any blind lambs or calves that made a show on the scales. I was just easier to claim the drouth was the trouble than it was to explain how much eye trouble the dust storms were causing.

The strange thing about all of town officials is they must not ever mingle with the hombres that hang out in coffee houses and domino halls. Were they to include our men on the street in their studies, four out of five of every branch of charity known to man would be part of our scene.

Doomsday is the dominant topic of every coffee session regardless of the price of lambs or the state of the cow markets. Had that high stepping land appraiser overheard the tales from the last calf sale, he'd have personally asked the Governor to come to our rescue instead of finding so much worth.

Winter is going to give us plenty of time to discuss the new tax base. Anytime September and October look worse than March generally does, spring isn't a far off time. I can't wait to file a new financial statement Monday morning. I wonder if that old boy would mind to come back and include second hand saddles in his appraisal. He's the first outsider who has ever been so fond of the Shortgrass Country in a dry fall.